

JESUS

The Master Teacher

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth . . . No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:1, 14, 18).

"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1).

Jesus has been universally acclaimed as the master teacher. And He was. In this sense He possessed a unique perfection. His was a lonely and separate splendor.

It was not necessary for Him to wait for time to cast about Him a halo of greatness. He was acknowledged to be great by His own generation. In His early ministry a great teacher addressed Him, "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2). Near the middle of His ministry, Matthew declares the following effect of the Sermon on the Mount, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). At the close of His public ministry, officers who had been sent to apprehend Jesus, though they found Him, came back without Him with the explanation, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

It is one thing to describe Christ in general language as the ideal teach-



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er. It is quite another thing to analyze the qualities of His teaching. For this message seven characteristics of His teaching will be presented.

I. The Motive of His Teaching Ministry Was Divine Approval. Men are moved by a variety of motives. Some seek individual success. Others are interested in public acclaim. Still others are concerned with monetary gain. And some pursue their teaching with personal safety in mind. Beyond these a host of reasons serve as motives for men.

But with Christ none of these were true. Paul declares that when He entered this world, "he took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7). He became the world's perfect servant. He, therefore, never sought anything except the approval of His master. In His teaching, as in all other things, He sought the glory of His Father. "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be

of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him" (John 7:14-18).

Near the close of His public ministry Christ said to the Jews: "When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him" (John 8:28-29). The Apostle Paul caught the meaning of this in Christ, and admonished his son Timothy in the faith: "Study to show thyself approved unto God" (II Tim. 2:15).

II. The Manner of His Teaching Was That of Absolute Assurance. In an amazing statement Christ said: "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16). In the power of this persuasion He conducted His teaching ministry. This made Him ever to speak with conviction. He was ever dogmatic in His teaching.

He never indulged in speculation. Not that speculation is wrong in itself. It is very much a part of our ministry because of what we are. We can scarcely get through one message without it. We are constantly saying, "It is probably so," "In all likelihood," "It is reasonable to suppose," "In my opinion," "So far as I can see," "I should like to suggest."

But Christ never once even intimated that He was mistaken. He never suggested that after more study or reflection He might change His mind. He made positive statements. In the first three Gospels He uses the word "verily" to introduce many of His affirmations. In the Gospel of John, over and over again He uses the same word twice to introduce His statements.

He offered no proofs for His statements, and He never argued to support His statements. If men wanted proof for His teaching, they could use the pragmatic test of doing the Father's will (John 7:17).

III. The Method of His Teaching Ministry Was Intensely Rational. He recognized that men were creatures

made in the image of God, and were therefore rational creatures. For this reason He appealed to human reason. He was constantly confronting the human mind with problems. He demanded that the human mind sit in judgment upon itself.

It is true that he called upon men for faith. But He did not recognize anything irrational in that. He regarded faith as an aid to reasoning. That is the reason the writer of Hebrews declared: "Through faith we understand" (Heb. 11:3). Therefore, in no sense did Christ call for blind credulity.

Having completed the triumphal entrance into the imperial city of Zion, Christ retired to the Temple and taught. In the course of this teaching, He repeatedly insisted that His hearers use their mind. "The baptism of John, whence was it?" (Matt. 21:23-27.) "But what think ye? a certain man had two sons" (Matt. 21:28-32). "Hear another parable . . . what will he do unto those husbandmen?" (Matt. 21:33-41.) "Did ye never read in the scriptures . . . ?" (Matt. 21:42-44.)

The result of this ministry of teaching was effective. The Jews reasoned correctly, and because they understood clearly the movement of His thought, they were compelled to pronounce their own judgment. And this angered them (Matt. 21:45-46).

IV. The Medium of His Teaching Ministry Was Perfect Intelligibility. This means that He spoke to be understood. This He did upon every occasion. Upon one of those occasions, His enemies "sent unto him certain of the Pharisees and of the Herodians, to catch him in his words" (Mark 12:13). They acknowledged that "thou regardest not the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth" (Mark 12:14), so they asked Him a question, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (Mark 12:14). His call for a coin, the identification of the image and superscription, and then the command: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's," left them marvelling (Mark 12:15-17). The reason for this response was the perfect clarity with which He dealt with the problem.

Later upon that occasion, one of

the scribes thought to catch Him, and this by raising a theological problem concerning the first commandment. With the same amazing skill in handling this difficult and rather abstruse problem, Christ taught from the Old Testament Scriptures the truth of God on this point. So clear and decisive was the answer, that the scribe was forced to admit the force of His teaching, even though he answered discreetly lest he further implicate himself. This silenced the crowd who were scheming against Him (Mark 12:28-34).

Since He taught the common people; that is, elemental humanity, He ever used common truth. These elemental truths, did not consist of the mere accidentals or trivialities of life, but the deeper things of life. For instance He spoke to a common woman at the well something that is common to all men, and yet the most profound words on the subject of worship ever uttered (John 4:19-24). It was because He used common language, words, illustrations that He always made himself intelligible to everyone.

V. The Material of His Teaching Ministry Was Essential Truth. At the conclusion of that amazing Sermon on the Mount it is declared: "And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29). The reason they were astonished at His teaching was because in its intrinsic nature it was authoritative.

This does not mean that it was authoritative because Christ said it was. He did say that it was. He often announced the authoritativeness of His teaching. But it was authoritative without the necessity of one word being spoken to that end. Nor does this mean that Christ's manner was authoritative. It was. But even if His manner had not been authoritative, the nature and content of His teaching would have possessed that quality. His teaching was the kind that brought an answering response from within. As men listened they were made to say: "Yes, that is so."

This does not mean that men obeyed what He taught, nor that they liked what He taught. They were

often angry at His words. In fact, men finally hounded Him out of this world because of His teaching. They did not cry out for His crucifixion because they did not believe what He taught was true, but because they did not want to obey it (Matt. 21:45-46). Many today deny His virgin birth, His deity, His vicarious death, and bodily resurrection; yet when confronted with the Sermon on the Mount, they do not hesitate to acknowledge it as absolutely true and authoritative.

VI. The Message of His Teaching Ministry Was the Eternal Word. In those solemn hours before His approaching death, when keeping lonely vigil with the Father, twice Christ described the content of His message. "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me . . . I have given them thy word . . . thy word is truth" (John 17:8, 14, 17). It is for this faithfulness in the task of teaching that He is called "the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 1:5; 3:14). In this sense He was the prophet of God.

It is often said that Christ was the most original speaker who ever spoke, and certainly with this statement one can scarcely find fault. And yet in a far larger sense, it is true that He was the most unoriginal speaker who ever spoke. Examination of His words in the light of the Old Testament will reveal that there is scarcely a word which He spoke but what He got it from the Old Testament. His mind was so saturated with the teaching of the Old Testament that His words, phrases, patterns of expression, allusions, illustrations are drawn from this source.

For Scriptural support there are no better words than His own. "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak" (John 12:49-50). "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God" (John 3:34). This guarantees the eternity and the infallibility of His message.

VII. The Movement of His Teaching Ministry Was Spiritual Purpose.

In declaring the content of His teaching ministry, Christ also pointed out its intent. He came to remove darkness (John 12:46), to save the world (John 12:47), and to minister life everlasting (John 12:50). In this respect it was necessary to compel the human will. To this end He arranged all His teaching. To the impotent man he said: "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:6). To a blind man He again addressed the will; "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" (Mark 10:51).

Christ never taught to satisfy mere intellectual curiosity. There are many things men have always desired to know. But Christ never said anything about them. His purpose was to impart knowledge in order to life or some phase of life. Men could live without a knowledge of a multitude of things which they desired to know. And His span of years were so brief He was compelled to dedicate them to the essentials for moral and spiritual life.

Though it was an achievement to be intellectually orthodox, Christ had no interest in the mere attainment of

this goal. Intellectual orthodoxy was a means to an end for Him. It was the way whereby men could come into that close fellowship with himself where they would share in holiness of character, essential goodness, spiritual life, and gracious conduct. Unlike the philosophers of Athens who gathered either to tell or hear some new thing, Christ rose infinitely above that and directed all His teaching to a spiritual end.

Christ's teaching ministry was climaxed in His ministry to the inner circle who were His own. He addressed them in the upper room, "Ye call me Master" (John 13:13). The Greek says, "The Teacher." He praises them for recognizing this quality in Him, and then affirms the reason, "For so I am." With this as a condition, He insists that they are obligated to follow His teaching (John 13:14).

This obligation is emphasized because He is Lord to them as well as teacher, and His teaching is the last word in all matters pertaining to faith and life. And certainly the servant is honor-bound and duty-

bound to bow to the authoritative teaching of His Lord (John 13:13-16). If men will acknowledge the quality of His teaching, bow to its authoritative demands, for them there will be happiness, and most of all a demonstration of fellowship of nature (John 13:17).

Besides all this, for every believer there is a possibility of growing in teaching ability into the likeness of Christ in His teaching ministry. Of Christ it was said: "The Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" (John 7:15). This they said of one who had never been privileged to take a professional course of study in one of the recognized schools. In Peter and John this leadership observed the same qualities as in Christ. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). By this it is evident that a fellowship of nature and experience will produce a fellowship of teaching skill.